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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [UN](#) [AF](#)
SUBJECT: UN IN AFGHANISTAN: SECURITY DRAWDOWN MAY NOT
AFFECT OPERATIONS, BUT HITS MORALE

REF: KABUL 3587

Classified By: PolCouns Annie Pforzheimer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (S) Summary: Two weeks after an attack on a UN guest house in Kabul that left five UN employees dead, top UN officials assert that operations will proceed basically unhindered. The attacks were devastating to the UN community and left many junior and mid-level UN staff debating whether adequate measures are in place to protect the "essential" staff remaining in Afghanistan, but Acting D/SRSG Wolfgang Weisbrod-Weber recently told us that the drawdown of staff will have "zero" effect on the UN's ability to fulfill its mission here. The public rift between the Karzai administration and UN leadership compounds the problem. We will continue to work with the UN, especially the political office, to shore up its operations and morale by lending public support when possible. End Summary.

UN Mission to Dubai?

¶2. (S) While confirming media reports that the UN has rented an entire hotel in Dubai, out of which non-essential UNAMA staff are operating, UN officials have told us that the relocation is temporary - approximately two months. The move to Dubai and other locations has involved less than half of all UN employees assigned to Afghanistan; 392 staff have left the country, while 764 remain. Of the 421 UNAMA staff, 302 will continue to work in Kabul, 21 will relocate within Afghanistan, and 91 will relocate outside of Afghanistan. UNDP-Elect has significantly reduced its staffing in Afghanistan, from 140 to 18 international staff, but that drawdown is attributed in part to the natural ebb in staffing needs following the resolution of the August 20 presidential and provincial council elections. UN officials believe that all essential staff will return to Afghanistan to resume their duties by January 2010, while non-essential staff will be permanently relocated. All UN agencies are trying to coordinate on a unified relocation site for non-essential staff.

Temporary Relocation, Not Evacuation

¶3. (S) Speaking to UN staff in Kabul on November 5, D/SRSG for Management and Development Robert Watkins assured his audience that the UN was undertaking a "temporary relocation," not an evacuation. He and other UN officials noted that the relocation can only end once the security situation has been assessed and adequate housing has been found for all staff. He said that the UN would take the next two months to assess the security situation and to develop a long-term strategy for the UN's safety in Afghanistan. Other UN officials have stated that if the UN continues to receive credible threats, the return of staff is likely to be

postponed. UN section heads in Kabul decided who was "critical" and needed to stay in Kabul, and who could be relocated temporarily. Most of the relocated staff are support staff who need not be in Afghanistan to conduct their work.

14. (S) Acting D/SRSG for Political Affairs Weisbrod-Weber asserted to us on November 11 that UN programs would continue with minimal disruption. Some programs, he said, would have to make do with fewer people, while for other programs, staff located outside of Afghanistan would pick up the slack. Acknowledging that the relocation will inevitably slow work in some areas, Weisbrod-Weber said that HR and management functions in particular would likely take longer, as many HR and management staff have been relocated. The staff relocation may affect planning for the 2010 election cycle.

Essential ... or Left Behind

15. (S) All essential UN staff remaining in Afghanistan are reportedly being moved to "secure" beds as defined by UN security protocols, but some staff are unconvinced. A UNAMA staffer remaining in Kabul reported to Poloff on November 5 that she is not confident that her new housing is any safer than her previous lodging. The UN, she noted, was making an effort to move people around, but UN staff did not believe that their safety was really a priority for the UN leadership. Commenting wryly that other staff are enjoying an all-expenses paid break, she said that those left behind are embittered that "some seem to have got a vacation" out of

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the attacks, while those remaining must continue to work under unsafe conditions. The UN is currently reviewing the criticality of each UN program in Afghanistan and will make decisions on which programs they can support from a security standpoint in the months to come. Another issue that is upsetting to UN staff is the manner of decision-making to date: seemingly arbitrary, last-minute and unsound in terms of addressing security concerns.

Karzai: UN is Inconsequential

16. (S) Following on the heels of the tragic attacks on the UN in Kabul, the Afghan Government has made critical, even disparaging, remarks concerning UN presence in Afghanistan. "They may or may not return," President Karzai said in an interview aired November 9 with PBS, "I don't think Afghanistan will notice it." This remark, along with FM Spanta's public rebuke of SRSG Eide on November 6 (reftel), has contributed to a feeling at the UN that the welcome mat has been pulled out from under them in Afghanistan. "We might be better appreciated spending this money and putting these people in Darfur," Weisbrod-Weber said to us privately.

Other UN officials have noted that a number of UNAMA political staff had resigned after former D/SRSG Galbraith left, compounding the problem; 11 out of 22 UNAMA political jobs are vacant, representing a 'brain-drain' in this unit.

17. (S) Comment: Beginning with former D/SRSG Galbraith's removal and the dissension it caused, to the devastating October 28 attacks and the new security posture, morale at the UN is at a low. The contradiction between the insistence of UN leadership that they are adequately providing for the safety of staff remaining in Afghanistan, and junior and mid-level staff complaining that their leadership is not taking their security seriously, may be creating a rift in the UN mission. The public rift between the Karzai administration and UN leadership seems to be contributing to a sense of futility. In the months to come, we will need to work with the UN, especially the political office, to shore up its operations and morale by lending public support when

possible. End comment.
EIKENBERRY